

CONSUMER ALERT



MISUSE OF AGRICULTURAL PESTICIDES IN AND AROUND HOMES, BUSINESSES AND INSTITUTIONS

February 1998

In an effort to protect people from misuse of potentially deadly agricultural pesticides in homes, businesses, and institutions, the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) have issued a public alert warning. There has been an emerging national pattern of illegal misuse of methyl parathion and possibly other agricultural pesticides in homes to kill roaches and other indoor insects. Methyl parathion can cause serious health problems in humans and pets. Methyl parathion, also known as "cotton poison," is a manmade pesticide that should only be used in open fields to control insects. It is commonly used on cotton, soybeans, and vegetable fields. This chemical is related to nerve gas. It is a brownish liquid that turns milky white when mixed with water. Methyl parathion smells like rotten eggs and can leave a yellow stain on areas where it has been sprayed. Methyl parathion has been marketed under the following product names: Nitrox; Penncap-M; Dithon 63; Ketokil 52; Seis-Tres 6-3; Metaspray 5E; and Paraspray 6-3.

Repeated illegal usage of methyl parathion has occurred in several states, including:

■ In 1994, serious methyl parathion contamination of homes and businesses was discovered in Lorain County, Ohio. EPA through the Superfund program, decontaminated 232 homes at a cost of more than \$20 million.

■ In April 1995, a similar incident was discovered in Detroit, Michigan. Four residences including a neighborhood homeless mission, required decontamination and restoration, costing approximately \$1 million.

■ In January 1997 in Jackson County, Mississippi, ATSDR and EPA discovered another incident which involved more than 900 homes that had been contaminated over a two-year period. This incident could cost more than \$50 million to clean up. In each incident, levels of the chemical were found at concentrations high enough to require the relocation of residents while their homes were decontaminated. Residents reported flu-like symptoms, diarrhea, headache, nausea and dizziness.

Consumers should beware of unlicensed individuals who illegally spray homes and businesses with the agricultural insecticide methyl parathion or any other pesticide intended for agricultural use. Consumers are warned to hire only licensed pest control operators to treat homes for pest control. Ask to see the credentials of any pest control applicator who treats your home. Find out the brand name of the pesticide and the product's active ingredient. This information is important if you or your family members become ill.

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Environmental exposure to methyl parathion can cause serious health effects, including: dizziness, confusion, restlessness, anxiety, headaches, breathing difficulties, chest tightness, blurred vision and death. Symptoms include muscle twitching, weakness, tremor, lack of coordination, excess sweating, abdominal cramps, vomiting and diarrhea. Severe poisoning can lead to convulsions, unconsciousness, cardiac arrest and death. Repeated exposure in amounts that are significant but don't lead to severe poisoning include persistent lack of appetite, weakness and malaise. Any misuse of a pesticide can be harmful.

Because methyl parathion breaks down slowly indoors, homes that have been sprayed with it pose a risk of serious health problems or death to humans and pets. Swallowing, inhaling, and skin contact with methyl parathion are all ways in which people can be exposed. Children, the elderly, and people with certain health problems are especially at risk. Pets can easily come in contact with methyl parathion on

floors and other indoor surfaces. Because of small body weights, household pets may quickly exhibit signs of methyl parathion poisoning, and serve as an early warning that a home or building in your area has been sprayed. Animals will experience the same type of health problems as humans.

If you purchase over the counter pesticide products for your own use, be sure the product has not been opened. Original pesticide containers are fully labeled and contain an EPA registration number. Remember, pesticides are poisons and should not be haphazardly used around a home or business. If you feel you have been exposed to methyl parathion or feel sick after a pesticide has been used, consult your doctor or local poison control center. If you are aware of any agricultural pesticides being used in or around homes, businesses or institutions, please call the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Regional Office, Pesticides Branch, in Kansas City, Kansas at (913) 551-7033 or toll-free 1-

Important Telephone Numbers:

**Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR)
Emergency Response Hotline (24 hours) - (404) 639-0615**

**Pesticide Information Telecommunications Network (PITN)
1-800-858-7378**

National Animal Poison Control Center - 1-800-548-2423

800-223-0425.